

WHY THEY  
CANNOT GO  
TO WAR . . .

THE existence of American citizens who cannot participate in any form of war is recognized by the Selective Service Training Act. A wide-spread understanding of why such individuals exist and a knowledge of their background is essential to the successful carrying out of this legislation.

Far back through the centuries there have been those who have found themselves unable to take the lives of their fellow men either in order to forward their own advantage or at the command of any external authority. Prominent among their motives have been religious concepts, based on an awareness of God and an acceptance of the brotherhood of man. To Christians, Jesus Christ has interpreted a way of life based on love of God and man, and the idea of overcoming evil with good. In the light of his awareness of God and his high sense of loyalty to Jesus, the Christian pacifist forms a judgment as to whether war is a proper and effective instrument for man to use in gaining his ends. His judgment is that it is not. This judgment is shared by most of mankind up to the time when, gripped by fear or hatred or greed, they embrace the war method. The pacifist maintains these beliefs even in the face of war, threatened aggression or other evils.

Nor is the pacifist unwilling to pay for his convictions. Although in the past they have been condemned to prison and some to death, like the long line of religious martyrs, they have willingly endured punishment for their deep belief.\* They

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\*In the United States, during the last World War, 17 were condemned to death, 142 to life imprisonment and many others to terms from 5 to 25 years. These sentences were all commuted after the war.

realize that in time of war loyalty to God and loyalty to the state seem to come into direct conflict. However, the conscientious objectors are not opposed to serving the state in its constructive processes. They are eager to do that. Their opposition is to war and conscription; they believe that war itself is so great an evil that their loyalty to both God and their country compels them to refrain from participation in it. This they look upon as one of the greatest services anyone can render to the state.

The government must decide whether people who conscientiously follow their conception of Christianity or other religious faiths are a detriment or an asset to the state. Will it profit the state to punish or kill those whose first loyalty is to a universal God and a brotherhood of all mankind, and who seek to serve the state by extending these ideals? Will the physical, mental and spiritual fibre of the conscientious objector be broken or toughened by persecution? Conscientious objectors are willing to serve their fellow men loyally in difficult tasks if they are permitted to do work which their conscience does not forbid. The state could wisely use this willingness to serve in ways which would advance the well-being of the state and at the same time that of the religious pacifist.

The early Christian church remained pacifist for nearly 200 years. Members of the Society of Friends or Quakers first testified to their refusal to resort to the war method almost three centuries ago. Declarations of the same nature were made at about that same time by two other groups, the Mennonites and the Church of the Brethren.

The Quakers, for example, in 1660 stated their objections in the following words to Charles II, King of England:

"We utterly deny all outward wars and strife, and fightings and outward weapons, for any end, or under any pretence whatever; this is our testimony to the whole world. The Spirit of Christ by which we are guided, is not changeable, so as to command us from a thing of evil and again to move us into it; and we certainly know, and testify to the world, that the Spirit of Christ, which leads us unto all truth, will never move us to fight and war against any man with outward weapons, neither for the Kingdom of Christ, nor for the kingdom of this world . . . Therefore, we cannot learn war any more."

Other religious faiths and organizations with high moral or spiritual purposes have recognized that war is not an acceptable method by which to seek to obtain the high ideals of man. In past wars in which our country has been involved, an unknown number of conscientious objectors have come from such faiths and organizations. The pacifists of the world have long advocated a spirit and program of international and interracial cooperation in political, economic and other fields which, had it been followed, would have prevented much of the strife now destroying mankind.

Great Britain passed its conscription law at the time it declared war. The law makes liberal provisions for conscientious objectors. Its provisions are not limited to objection based on religious training or belief. It provides for complete exemp-

tion for the individual who cannot accept compulsory service of any kind under the state. Something of the spirit of British liberalism toward the conscientious objector appears in the *Manchester Guardian* of August 23, 1940 (page 118), published in London in the midst of the life and death struggle going on there.

"The Archbishop of York (Dr. Temple) writes in the York Diocesan leaflet:

Several public bodies have lately passed resolutions terminating the employment of any persons working for them who have pleaded conscientious objection to military service.

I regard this as utterly deplorable and in the deepest sense unpatriotic. We are fighting for freedom, including freedom of conscience as its most vital and sensitive element. The State has recognized the reality of conscientious objection to military service, and it is part of our glory that it does this.

There is excellent reason for saying that if a man is called up and refuses to serve he shall be put at once in the same financial position as if he were serving in the forces. He ought not to gain financially by his refusal to serve. But to deprive him of employment is to frustrate the action of the State and destroy our most effective witness to our own cause."

Under the Selective Service Training Act signed by the President of the United States on September 16, 1940, provision has been made for the con-

scientious objector. The law states "that nothing contained in this act shall be construed to require any person to be subject to combatant training and service in the land or naval forces of the United States who, by reason of religious training and belief, is conscientiously opposed to participation in war in any form." The law goes on to provide ways and means by which the good faith of the conscientious objector shall be determined and to provide that those of good faith be assigned to perform "work of national importance under civilian direction." A wise administration of this provision of the law can result in enriching the state and its citizens; an unwise administration can only result in bringing into direct and unnecessary conflict with the state those citizens who are seeking ways in which they may reconcile love of God with love of country.

The law applies to people of religious training and belief. It deliberately avoids mention of membership in any church. Evidently the intent of the law is that conscience should not be looked upon as a monopoly of any church, or even of the church as a whole, but that it should be a matter of individual attitude. Many who come before the draft boards will not have any church membership but their opposition to war will stem back into a religious training from their home, their schools, or other experiences. There will be another group of sincere, loyal citizens who are unable to take part in war because they see its futility and its economic waste. And there are those humanitarians who are unable to take part in war on ethical and moral grounds.

In the last war there was a provision in the draft law exempting from armed service only those individuals who belonged to certain religious sects. In practice Woodrow Wilson extended exemption from armed service to people of other denominations and even to those who were opposed to war on grounds other than religious.

The present conscription act providing for conscientious objectors is evidence of the characteristic American determination to preserve individual religious freedom. It is a traditional American belief that a stable society can be built only if the integrity of its members is maintained and developed. The interests of the state require that the conscription law be administered so as to discover those services which individual citizens are, under the dictate of their conscience, best fitted to render to their country and fellow men. Thus will the integrity of its citizens be maintained and their loyalty to the state be enhanced and given its most adequate expression.

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